

# The Geoduck Transplanted from Washington

## by Squtxulenuhw (George Seymour)

I'm going to share the story about *pune'q* (*pun-EK*) as my father shared it to me when I was pretty young. People call them geoduck (GOO-ee-duk) in English, which is a word that comes from the Lushootseed (Puget Sound Salish) word *g'widəq*.

On weekends or holidays, I used to go out in the boat with my dad to the different Gulf Islands: Gabriola, Saltspring, Valdez, all the little Gulf Islands, to get baby oysters to transplant to where I'm from in Kulleet Bay. And we did that, filled the boat up a few times, went out, got the little baby oysters and brought them back. And one day, we got caught in the wind, so we had to go spend the night behind one of the little islands. My father built a fire and steamed some clams and *tluxw-tluxw* and had water for his tea to drink.

We stayed there overnight and camped and I asked him, "Why did we transplant the oysters Dad?"

And he said, "Well, I've got to pay for my new car, my new TV, my new phone."

We were one of the first families to get nice cars and TV's. After transplanting the oysters, we needed to wait for them to grow big enough for commercial sale, and then, in the winter, rain or snow, we would fill a big scow, (a big barge) full of the oysters and sell them.

My brothers and I would fill wheelbarrows full of *tluxw-tluxw* and run them up the ramp into the scow. It held a lot of oysters - thousands and thousands! Somebody would be inside the scow with a big pitchfork, piling the *tluxw-tluxw* higher and higher. It was a

lot of work. I remember my dad would sell them to the highest bidder, he knew what he was doing. And then he had enough money to buy a nice car, a TV and many other things too.



My dad also told me that my grandfather transplanted seafood too, but he didn't just transplant *tluxw-tluxw*, he did it with big giant clams we call *pune'q*, the geoduck too.

My traditional name came from my Grandfather, his name was also Squthulenuhw, and his European name was Tom Semu. But this story was shared by my father, also called Squthulenuhw. It was my father that changed our European name from Semu to Seymour. He went to residential school and learned to read and write when he was there.

My Grandfather used to go down to Orcas Island on the American side, in what is now called Washington, and he actually transplanted the geoducks. They dragged them along in the water in a long net or long basket that was weaved out of cedar bark, and traveled up along the different Gulf Islands up to Kulleet Bay. He wondered if they would survive, and they did survive.

Down in Washington he was able to harvest on low tide right off the beach. He was wondering if he would be able to harvest them easily on the beach after transplanting them to our area. So he transplanted some at the mouth of the Chemainus River and then outside Kulleet Bay and Coffin Point near the shore, but it didn't work the way he hoped, they ended up only remaining in deeper waters.

I asked my Dad "How did they harvest it?"

He said. "Well, they harvested it in January. And that's the time of year we call **puné'q**."

He said that it was harvested at nighttime, when the tide is at its lowest. January had the biggest tides, the highest and the lowest. I guess they call it the king tides today. But he said that's when they harvested. It was usually a full moon too, so they could see a little bit, but they also used torches on the **suníxwulh** (canoes).

Each family had two or three divers and they took turns diving. The families would mark their spots. There wasn't too many families that had divers, but the ones did shared with the other ones that couldn't. So that's what they did. They had their **suníxwulh** ready, their torches ready, and the divers were ready, and on the beach, they lit their fires.

Because it was a lower super low tide, some of the people knew the beach, knew the area, so they chose the spot where the divers wouldn't have to dive down so far. Some of the divers were not so lucky and had to dive down at least 12 feet from a canoe. The lucky divers with the best spots dove into the water where it was very shallow, sometimes only 4 or 5 feet. And the gooey ducks would be easy to get.

The divers would come off their **suníxwulh** and dive down, and the siphon of the clams, the neck or tongue that sticks out, would be feeding in the current. The siphons were



really long and even when the **puné'q** were deep in the sand they would stick out to feed. And that's why the divers would go down very slowly and gently, and quietly, to not scare them and make them pull the siphon back under the sand.

When they got to the bottom, they grabbed the siphons of two clams, put their feet on the seafloor, bent their knees and pulled it out of the ground. Sometimes they got one, or two, or sometimes they got none. But if the siphons went down into the sand, they'd have to wait until it would come up again

because the *puné'q*, could go down a long way into the mud or sand, but eventually they'd come out again because they had to eat.

The divers would take turns diving, and when they weren't diving, they went onto the beach to warm up by the fire. It was really cold in the water but they got used to it. The families would give them the mountain goat blankets, and these blankets were only used by the headmen or the leaders of each big family. Today we would call them Chiefs. But these divers were allowed to use these blankets because they were highly respected and did the dangerous work of going into the dark, frigid waters to harvest these *puné'q*, the geoducks.

But anyways, that's what they did. And when the clams did come back up, the divers would be hanging on a *snuxwulh* and the people in the boat with the torches would be watching to see when the siphons come back out of the sand and they would signal the divers to go down again. When they figured they had enough, they would take what they needed and then share with the rest of the community, especially the elders, so everybody got some of the geoducks.

To prepare it, they diced it up and put it in a soup or sometimes they would fry it too. They also sliced it up thin and smoked it and dried it. The dried meat was put away for the winter food and later they would use it in soup. Sometimes they would eat it dried, but it was very chewy, they called it Indian



gum. We made dishes out of the giant shells too, we called them *cé'wí'*.

So that is the story of the *puné'q*, the geoduck story, how my grandfather actually transplanted them here from Washington and how and some of his people harvested.

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Not too many people harvested in my time because the government actually closed the beaches for our fishing and commercial fishing of all clams too. I guess over many years the deep-sea divers actually made a lot of money on our far shores because our geoducks were way bigger than most. When the deep sea divers were trying to take the geoduck around here, they were shut down because the Stz'uminus people asked them to stop. They were using a big pump and the geoducks were getting harvested way too fast. It was actually pretty peaceful. We asked them to stop and they did after some negotiations.

Our geoduck bed was second in size only to the Ahousat geoduck bed on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. That was really interesting to me. I found that out when I was speaking publicly in Port Angeles and I introduced myself and shared that I was related to Chief Seattle. He was my great,

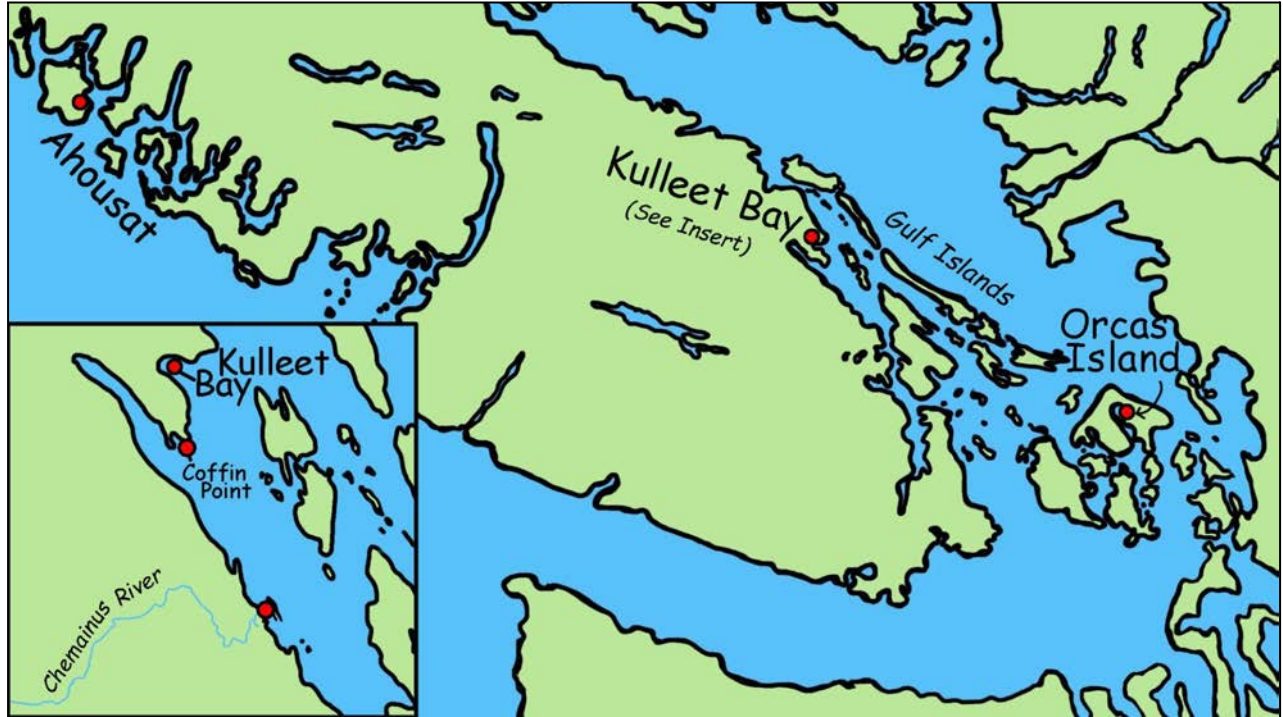
great, grand uncle. And a lot of the people actually came up and introduced themselves to me after and I found out that I have a lot of relatives on that side of the border, in the US or what we call *peston* in *hul'qumínum'* – That's because of the Boston Trading Company long ago in the US. I'm

related to some of the people from Ahouseet too, so I wonder... if they have the biggest geoduck bed, maybe the beds are all from the same origin. We are second to them in the size of our bed and it really connects to the transplanting of the geoducks through relatives.

I guess I could say that's the end of this story.

*Huy ch q'a'.*

**Squtxulenuhw (George Seymour)**



**Image Credits:**

- *Geoduck held in two hands*, courtesy of The Evergreen State College, photo by Shauna Bittle.
- *What is that???*, Geoduck on Harstine Island beach, photo by Jeff (Flickr)
- *Geoduck, thinly sliced with lemon*, photo by T. Tseng (Flickr)
- *Transplanting puné'q key locations map*, NLPS Learns, created by Tannis Calder

**Huǵumínum Words:**

**puné'q** – geoduck  
**suníxwulh** – canoes  
**če'wi'** - shell dish

**tluxw-tluxw** – oysters  
**snuxwulh** – canoe  
**peston** - United States

